

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2046

C O N F I D E N T I A L B U C H A R E S T 1 6 8 3

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER: ROMANIAN EARTHQUAKE

REF: STATE 051951

SUMMARY: MACOVESCU SUMMONED ME TONIGHT TO REGISTER GOR'S DISPLEASURE OVER FACT THAT A "SECRET" COMMUNICATION BETWEEN USG AND GOR RELATING TO POSSIBLE SECOND EARTHQUAKE HERE HAD BEEN MADE PUBLIC BY ME AND DEPT. SAID AMBASSADOR NICOLAE HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO MAKE SIMILAR APPROACH TO DEPT.

1. I FELT THE EFFECTS OF THE FIRST AFTER TREMORS OF THE MARCH 4 EARTHQUAKE TONIGHT AT A HASTILY SUMMONED MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER MACOVESCU AND DEP FOREIGN MINISTER PACOSTE. DCM ALSO PRESENT.

2. MACOVESCU SAID THAT UNDER INSTRUCTIONS FROM LEADERSHIP HE WISHED MAKE FOLLOWING POINTS:

A) GOVERNMENT APPRECIATED VERY MUCH RECEIPT THIS MORNING OF TELEGRAM I CONVEYED TO PACOSTE PERTAINING TO POSSIBILITY OF SECOND EARTHQUAKE.

B) FACT THAT "SECRET" TELEGRAM NOW IN HANDS OF NOT LESS
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THAN 30 OTHER PERSONS AS WELL AS PRESS HAS COME AS SHOCK TO GOR.

C) IN ADDITION PRESS CONFERENCE WHICH I HELD THIS EVENING TRANSFORMED SUBJECT OF SERIOUS CONSEQUENCE INTO A DRAMA. THESE TWO FACTS HAD RESULT OF STIMULATING PANIC AMONG POPULACE, SOMETHING WHICH GOR HAS MADE STRENUEOUS EFFORT TO AVOID

THROUGHOUT CRISIS.

D) FACT THAT I HAD MADE PUBLIC AN OFFICIAL DOCUMENT INTENDED SOLELY FOR USE OF GOR COULD ONLY BE CONSIDERED AS "AN ACT OF PROPAGANDA." FURTHER CONFIRMING EVIDENCE OF THIS WAS OFFERED BY HOURLY RFE REPORTING ON DETAILS OF TELEGRAM.

E) MY ACTIONS HAD TAKEN GOR COMPLETELY BY SURPRISE AND HE WAS UNDER INSTRUCTIONS FROM LEADERSHIP TO REQUEST THAT I NOT REPEAT SUCH A PERFORMANCE.

F) AS IF THIS WERE NOT BADENOUGH, DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAD ALSO PUT OUT SAME INFORMATION.

2. I RESPONDED AS FOLLOWS:

A) HE AND I HAD KNOWN ONE ANOTHER WELL ENOUGH AND LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT NEITHER MY ACTIONS NOR THOSE OF U.S. GOVERNMENT IN ANY WAY CONSTITUTED AN ACT OF PROPAGANDA.

B) I HAD TOLD PACOSTE DURING OUR MEETING THIS MORNING I HAD AN OBLIGATION TO SHARE THIS NEWS WITH EMBASSY STAFF. THIS I HAD DONE, BUT THAT I HAD MADE STRENUOUS EFFORT, AS I SAID I WOULD, TO PUT NEWS IN PROPER PERSPECTIVE AND TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO COUNTERACT ANY POTENTIAL REACTIONS OF PANIC. I ASSUMED HE HAD MEANS OF VERIFYING MANNER IN WHICH I HAD HANDLED MEETING.

C) FOREIGN PRESS HAD ASKED ME YESTERDAY FOR MEETING TODAY
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TO GAIN OUR APPRECIATION OF IMPACT OF EARTHQUAKE AND TO LEARN OF ROLE U.S. WAS PLAYING IN POST-EARTHQUAKE AID AND RECONSTRUCTION EFFORT. NATURALLY, SUBJECT OF POSSIBLE SECOND QUAKE WAS RAISED, BUT THIS WAS NOT SOLE SUBJECT DISCUSSED AT CONFERENCE. IN FACT IT REPRESENTED LESS THAN HALF OF CONFERENCE. I HAD USED OCCASION AGAINTO PUT SITUATION INTO PERSPECTIVE AND TO CAUTION AGAINST DISTORTING HISTORICAL RECORD OF PAST EARTHQUAKES IN REGION BY DRAWING ANY INEVITABLE PREDICTIONS OR CONCLUSIONS.

D) I HOPED MINISTER AND HIS LEADERS UNDERSTAND THAT IT WAS NEITHER IN MY PERSONAL INTEREST OR U.S. GOVERNMENT'S TO CREATE A SITUATION OF PANIC. TO THE CONTRARY, I HAD ASSURED PACOSTE THIS MORNING IT WAS IN OUR MUTUAL INTEREST TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO COUNTERACT ANY REACTIONS OF HYSTERIA OR PANIC BY SEEING THAT ACCURATE INFORMATION WAS MADE AVAILABLE. I HAD STRESSED TO HIM THAT IN PASSING ESSENCE OF DEPT'S TELEGRAM TO HIS SUPERIORS HE SHOULD BE MINDFUL OF KEEPING INFORMATION IN APPROPRIATE CONTEXT. IN ESSENCE, THIS WAS THAT PHENOMENON OF

PAIRED QUAKES OF 1940 FOR EXAMPLE, COULD REPEAT COULD HAPPEN AGAIN.

E) I WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO HAVE BEEN IN SITUATION NOT TO HAVE FELT IT NECESSARY TO MAKE INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO EMBASSY STAFF, BUT AS I HAD TOLD ACOSTE I FELT UNDER ABSOLUTE OBLIGATION TO DO SO. IN ANTICIPATION OF POSSIBLE NEGATIVE REACTION TO TELEGRAM ONCE IT (INEVITABLY) BECAME PUBLIC I HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH WASHINGTON BY CABLE AND BY PHONE THIS AFTERNOON. THE DEPT HAD ISSUED AN AMPLIFYING STATEMENT AT NOON TODAY STRESSING ITS TELEGRAM WAS NOT A PREDICTION BUT MERELY A RECITAL OF HISTORICAL RECORD OF ACTIVITY AND POTENTIAL PROBLEMS DERIVING THEREFROM.

3. MACOVESCU RESPONDED THAT DESPITE GOR'S APPRECIATION OF OUR GESTURE, FACT WAS RADIO, TELEPHONES AND LEADERSHIP WERE BOMBARDING HIM WITH QUERIES AS TO MEANING OF EVENTS. IT WAS CONVICTION
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OF GOR THAT DEPT'S MESSAGE WAS A DIPLOMATIC COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TWO GOVERNMENTS AND SHOULD HAVE BEEN TREATED ACCORDINGLY. WHAT I HAD TOLD EMBASSY STAFF WAS MY AFFAIR. BUT BY DISCUSSING ISSUE IN A PRESS CONFERENCE I HAD GONE BEYOND BOUNDARIES OF NORMAL CONDUCT. I HAD NOT HELPED ANYONE BY MY ACTIONS.

4. I RESPONDED THAT AS HE WELL KNEW FROM TIME TO TIME WE DISAGREED. THIS WAS ONE OF THOSE MOMENTS. HE WOULD UNDERSTAND AS AN EX-AMBASSADOR THERE WERE TIMES WHEN THERE WAS A MORAL OBLIGATION TO INFORM ONE'S COLLEAGUES IN DETAIL OF A SITUATION.

5. MACOVESCU INTERRUPTED TO SAY HE FULLY UNDERSTOOD THIS, BUT THAT ONE ALSO HAD TO MEASURE IMPLICATIONS OF ONE'S ACTIONS ON OTHERS. IN THIS SITUATION THE IMPLICATIONS WERE SERIOUS AND WIDESPREAD.

6. I ANSWERED THAT IN THIS RESPECT HE HAD AN ADVANTAGE OVER ME BY VIRTUE CONTROLLING THE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION. CONVERSATION AT THIS JUNCTURE DETERIORATED INTO DEBATE ON WHOSE SOCIETY WAS THE MORE DISCIPLINED AND ABLE TO COPE WITH CATASTROPHES (MACOVESCU OPTED FOR AMERICANS).

7. MUYOVESCU SAID AMBASSADOR NICOLAE WAS BEING INSTRUCTED TO MAKE KNOWN GOR'S DISMAY OVER DEPT'S RELEASE OF SEISMOLOGICAL INFORMATION IN SUCH A WAY AS TO INCREASE POSSIBILITY OF PANIC REACTION IN ROMANIA.

8. I STEERED CONVERSATION BACK TO MY MORNING CONVERSATION WITH PACOSTE, STRESSING THAT I HAD MADE CLEAR THAT SUBJECT MATTER IN NO WAY WAS SECRET. I SAID I REGRETTED IF SITUATION HAD IN ANY WAY

DEVELOPED SO AS TO PRODUCE PANIC. MACOVESCU SAID ALL HE WANTED
WAS FOR ME TO PROMISE I WOULD DO ALL THAT WAS HUMANLY POSSIBLE
TO AVOID REPETITION OF SUCH A CHAIN OF EVENTS. I PROMISED I WOULD
DO ALL THAT WAS "HUMANLY" POSSIBLE, BUT ADDED THAT NEXT TIME I
HAD SENSITIVE INFORMATION AVAILABLE I WOULD BE EXTRA CAREFUL
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AS TO WHETHER I PASSED IT ON TO ANYONE OR NOT. MEETING ENDED
WITH MUTUAL REGRETS THAT SUCH A CONVERSATION HAD BEEN NECESSARY.

COMMENT: LESSON NUMBER ONE SEEMS TO ME THAT YOU CAN'T WIN
IN THE GAME OF DEALING OPENLY WITH A CLOSED SOCIETY. I FEEL, AND SO
REPEATED TO MACOVESCU, THAT I HAD NO OTHER RECOURSE OTHER THAN
TO MAKE FACTS OF SITUATION AVAILABLE TO MY COLLEAGUES, NO MATTER
THE CONSEQUENCES. QUITE PREDICTABLY, THIS COURSE OF ACTION IS
NOT ONE THIS REGIME EITHER APPROVED OF OR PERHAPS CAN EVEN
UNDERSTAND.

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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